Govt. links intel grid to National Population Register, agencies can access details of 119 crore residents

The Home Ministry has been advocating the use of NATGRID by State police and Central agencies to collect intelligence and speed up investigation of criminal cases

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The access to NATGRID is so far available to Superintendent of Police-rank officers, while earlier it was only meant to be accessible to ten Central agencies. File image for representational purposes. | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphotos

The National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID), a secure platform for the police and investigating agencies to access government and private databases in real-time, has been linked to the National Population Register (NPR), which has the family-wise details of 119 crore residents in India, government officials said.

The Union Home Ministry has been pushing for the enhanced use of NATGRID by State police and other Central law and security agencies for intelligence gathering and for speedy investigation in criminal cases through indigenous and secure platforms.

The Hindu had reported on December 7 that NATGRID is, on an average, getting around 45,000 requests per month. The platform, accessible only to security agencies, became operational last year after first being conceptualised in 2009 in the aftermath of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks.

The data for NPR, which stores information family wise, was first collected in 2010 with the first phase of the 2011 Census and was last updated in 2015 through door-door enumeration. It was to be updated further during the 2021 Census which was indefinitely delayed due to COVID-19 pandemic.

On December 12, when the Union Cabinet approved the proposal for conducting Census 2027 at a cost of ₹11,718 crore, there was no separate allocation for the NPR and earlier on July 29, the government informed the Lok Sabha that no decision has been taken to update the NPR during the forthcoming Census exercise.

NPR is the first step for the creation of a countrywide National Register of Citizens (NRC).

On December 9, the Ministry informed the Lok Sabha that an Organised Crime Network Database is being developed on NATGRID's IT platform to facilitate secure data-sharing between National Investigation Agency (NIA) and State Anti-Terror Squads (ATS). The reply added that upgraded NATGRID tools, particularly 'Gandiva', are supporting multi-source data collection and analysis.

Elaborating about Gandiva, a State police official said the details of all family members of a suspect or a person of interest if available in NPR could be accessed through the platform. Gandiva can be used for facial recognition and entity resolution.

NATGRID to have access to database that links around 14,000 police stations

Government links National Intelligence Grid to National Population Register

| Video Credit: The Hindu

"If the image of a suspect is available, it can be fed into Gandiva. If any photo identity document such as telecom KYC or vehicle registration or driving licence matches with the photo, Gandiva can provide the details, thereby saving time and resources of an investigator," said the official.

The official added that the request has been classified into three categories: non-sensitive, sensitive, and highly sensitive. Bank statements, financial transactions, tax information, export-import data have been classified as highly sensitive information, said the official.

When asked about privacy concerns as the police and security agencies can access almost all kinds of data about a citizen without even having to register a First Information Report, the official said, "Each query is logged in the system. The purpose of the information being sought has to be stated and the senior police officers have an oversight. There are several checks and balances."

The Ministry has asked the States to liberally use the platform to access datasets which includes details of driving licence, vehicle registration, Aadhaar, airline data, bank records, FASTAG, passport and travel details of foreigners and Indians, suspicious transaction reports from Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), railway passengers, and also extract and analyse data from social media posts.

The access to NATGRID is so far available to Superintendent of Police-rank officers, while earlier it was only meant to be accessible to ten Central agencies such as the Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing, NIA, Enforcement Directorate, FIU, Narcotics Control Bureau, and Directorate of Revenue Intelligence among others.

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